

The institutional integration of an expanded EU: or: how 'new' European actors fit into 'old' European institutions

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Forschungsbericht / research report

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kreppel, A., & Gungor, G. (2006). *The institutional integration of an expanded EU: or: how 'new' European actors fit into 'old' European institutions*. (Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Institut für Höhere Studien, Abt. Politikwissenschaft, 108). Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-245781>

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March 2006

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Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share “work in progress” before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department’s teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Abstract

This paper investigates the potential impact of the recent enlargement of the European Union to Central and Eastern Europe on the internal organization structure and functioning of the European Parliament. The analysis focuses on the differing cultures of political and partisan activity in the new member states in comparison to both the member-states in Western Europe and the European Parliament itself. Although the research presented is preliminary in nature, it suggests that the absorption of members from new member states into the existing supranational party structures may be difficult due to the variations in ideological perspectives and norms of internal party organization between East and West. There are, however, other aspects of the EP that may facilitate the integration of new members from the East into the EP as a whole. In particular, this research highlights the weakness of the national party systems and subsequent development of independent parliaments with strong and active committees in the enlargement countries. Both of these developments have led to a comparatively high level of independent legislative influence for both committees and rank-and-file members. In many ways this is similar to the situation in the EP (albeit for different reasons). This may ease the entry of the new members into the EP, while at the same time hindering their full integration within the more structured supranational party groups.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht den möglichen Einfluss der letzten EU-Erweiterungsrunde um die zentral- und osteuropäischen Länder auf die interne Organisationsstruktur und die Arbeitsweise des Europäischen Parlaments. Die Analyse konzentriert sich auf die unterschiedlichen Politik- und Parteikulturen (sowie -aktivitäten) in den neuen Mitgliedsländern und vergleicht sie mit jenen in den westeuropäischen Mitgliedsstaaten sowie jenen des Europäischen Parlaments. Obwohl die vorliegenden Forschungsergebnisse nur vorläufig sind, können wir daraus schließen, dass die Aufnahme von Parlamentariern aus den neuen Mitgliedstaaten in die existierenden supranationalen Parteistrukturen schwierig sein könnte, da zwischen Ost und West unterschiedliche Auffassungen in Bezug auf ideologische Perspektiven und hinsichtlich interner Parteiorganisationsnormen bestehen.

Es gibt jedoch auch andere Aspekte innerhalb des Europäischen Parlaments, welche die Integration der neuen Mitgliedstaaten in das Europäische Parlament erleichtern. Die Forschungsergebnisse weisen im Besonderen auf die Schwäche der nationalen Parteiensysteme in den Erweiterungsländern und die darauf folgende Entwicklung von unabhängigen Parlamenten mit starken und aktiven Komitees hin. Diese beiden Entwicklungen haben zu einem vergleichsweise hohen Grad von unabhängigem legislativen Einfluss von Komitees und einfachen Parteimitgliedern geführt. In vielen Fällen ist diese Entwicklung gleichzusetzen mit der Situation im Europäischen Parlament (wenngleich auch aus unterschiedlichen Beweggründen). Dies könnte den Zugang der neuen Mitglieder zum Europäischen Parlament erleichtern, während gleichzeitig die vollständige Integration in besser strukturierte supranationale Fraktionen (party groups) verhindert wird.

Keywords

European Parliament, Eastern Enlargement, Parliamentary Systems, Internal Party Organization in East and West Europe, Party Cohesion, Committee System

Schlagwörter

Europäisches Parlament, Osterweiterung, Parlamentarische Systeme, Parteiorganisation in Ost- und Westeuropa, Parteikohäsion, Komitees

General note on content

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the IHS Department of Political Science

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Introduction

On 1 May 2004, the European Union (EU) underwent its largest enlargement ever, accepting ten new members largely from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Given the magnitude of the enlargement, it is not surprising that some have questioned the ability of the EU's institutions to absorb the multitude of newcomers. In addition to purely numerical considerations (such as how to maintain a collegial Commission or the relative distribution of weighted votes within the Council), are other more comprehensive concerns. Amongst these is the potential impact of the new member state representatives on the norms of behavior and day-to-day functioning of the institutions. Despite their various differences, the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe share a common communist legacy that distinguishes them as a group from the 'old' member states of the EU-15. However, the unique path and relative success that each experienced during the transition to democracy has also insured a significant level of internal variation among the new member states. The result is an increase in the diversity of political rules and norms represented by the member states within the EU. Although the influx of new members will most likely have an impact on all of the key EU institutions this research focuses on the potential impact of enlargement on the European Parliament (EP).

During the treaty negotiations leading up to enlargement the discussions pertaining to the EP were (together with those related to the Court of Justice) the least controversial. Although there was some bargaining over increases and decreases in national membership (seats) in the EP, far more attention was paid to the question of representation in the Commission and voting weights in the Council of Ministers. Despite this relative absence of controversy or concern, as the sole repository of direct public participation in the EU, the EP holds an important position within the EU, and is arguably the institution that will bear the largest burden of enlargement in terms of its internal organization and functioning.

The EP is the primary arena of partisan activity and is an increasingly important aspect of the legislative process in the EU (Hix, 1999; Kreppel, 1999; 2000; Tsebelis, 1994). As such it will have to incorporate and adjust to the significant variations in party systems and legislative norms both among the new members and between them and the old members. The influx of new members is thus important, not primarily because of the new numerical considerations it will impose (although these are not insignificant), but because these carry with them increased diversity and variation in norms of parliamentary and party behavior. The new members from CEE bring with them not just an escalation in ideological diversity, but also

(and perhaps more significantly) a potentially new set of organizational and behavioral norms that reflect the partisan and legislative customs in their home countries.

Although it is true that all of the new member states have adopted essentially parliamentary systems,¹ they vary widely in terms of the effective roles and powers of their legislatures, the balance of power between legislature and executive and the level of control exerted by the political parties. All of these are likely to affect the expectations and behavior of incoming new members who will generally be most familiar with their own national patterns of political interaction. The EP has historically been deeply impacted by the absorption of national norms into its own informal norms and formal rules of procedure. One need only think of the role of *rapporteurs* (French), question time (British) and the previous ability of the committees to determine final outcomes without recourse to the floor through the 'expedited procedure' (Italian). Current debates over the Members' Statute likewise reflect national norms across Scandinavia. If past history is an indication, it is likely that the new member states will also bring with them traditions and norms that may affect the ways in which the EP functions and the way that the new members are able to function within the EP.

To begin to understand what these changes might look like and what their long term impact may be it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the norms of partisan activity and control as well as internal legislative organization within the new member states. This will allow a greater understanding of how and where there are significant differences with the EP and the old member states. Only then can we begin to predict what the potential impact of enlargement will be on the internal functioning of the Parliament, and through the EP, on the functioning of the EU as a whole. We begin the process of answering these questions through an examination of the general partisan and parliamentary politics of the new member states. While ideally a detailed analysis would be completed for each of the new member states individually, that task lies outside of the scope of this research. Instead, this initial foray is intended as a general introduction to the basic question. Our analysis of the likely impact of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) from the new member states focuses on the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) and even within this group individual exceptions to general conclusions are likely.

In the first two sections we briefly review the current situation within the EP in terms of the role of the party groups, level of internal party hierarchy and control within it (section 1) as

¹ Those that had initially seemed more inclined to go the semi-presidential route have over time become increasingly parliamentary. This is particularly true for Poland since the passage of the 1997 Constitution and the re-election of President Kwasniewski.

well as its internal organizational and hierarchical structure, with an emphasis on the crucial role played by committees and the legislative power of the EP (section 2). In the third section we examine the role of parties within the legislatures of the enlargement countries, with an emphasis on the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. This analysis focuses on the level of party control over individual members and the internal hierarchical structures of the legislatures, followed by an examination of the legislatures themselves, their internal organizational structure, relative independence from the executive and ability to influence legislative outcomes. We conclude with a discussion of the likely impact of the traditions, norms and rules of the new members and the extent to which they are likely to influence and/or fit with those already existing within the EP. Throughout we will make both implicit and explicit comparisons with the situation in the EU-15, as representatives from these states must also mesh national norms with European institutions.

The overall goal of the project is to highlight potential areas of conflict and tension as well as underline the extent to which in some areas representatives from the new member states may actually find themselves more at home in the EP than their Western European colleagues. However, while this project is designed to highlight some potential consequences of the recent enlargement on the internal organization and functioning of the EP, the accuracy of these predictions is not likely to be known for some time. The first post-enlargement legislature (July 2004-June 2009) has not yet crossed the half-way mark and even in the rapidly developing world of the EU, institutional adaptation to large scale change takes time.

I. Partisan Politics and Control in the EP

The party groups of the EP are unlike any of the national level parties. They are, on the whole less powerful in terms of controlling their members since they do not control the electoral lists/re-election. In addition, due to the relative independence of the EU executive, they have none of the standard tools of manipulation granted to parties in national governing coalitions (such as the French 'guillotine vote').² Nonetheless, the supranational party groups are powerful in terms of controlling the activities of the legislature as a whole. The bulk of the

² Although the EP has the power to censure the Commission this is not, at least currently, the same kind of tool of political control that is tends to be at the national level. In the EU context censure more closely resembles impeachment in the sense that thus far the only time it was credibly threatened it related to executive mismanagement and nepotism, not policy differences or ideological conflicts.

activity of the EP is organized by and around the party groups and to a certain extent the national party delegations within them (Hix, Kreppel and Noury, 2003; Kreppel, 2002).

The party groups are the basic organizational sub-unit of the EP. Everything from office space to the allocation of funds and speaking time on the floor is distributed on the basis of the party groups and their relative size.³ Many of the most crucial decisions in the EP are made in the Conference of Presidents (see below), which consists of party group representatives, insuring that it is the party groups that functionally control the decisions of that body.⁴ The highly institutionalized norm of using the party groups as the basic organizational unit of the EP dates back over fifty years to the early days of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community and is reflected in the comparatively well-organized character of the major party groups, which have an equally long history (Raunio, 1997; Kreppel, 2002).

A high level of internal party group organization occurs despite the generally significant internal diversity found in most of the supranational party groups. This internal diversity is natural result of being composed of numerous national party delegations that are generally more cohesive than the party groups themselves.⁵ Despite the internal variations between the national delegations, the party groups have surprisingly high levels of voting cohesion and generally act as a unit, although there are some exceptions, and party group cohesion varies over time, by party group and by subject area (Raunio, 1999; Kreppel, 2000; Carubba and Gabel, 2003).

Overall, the party groups in the EP (particularly the largest ones) reflect the standards and norms of political parties at the national level, albeit in a somewhat mitigated fashion. The basic structure of most of the party groups is hierarchical (with a partial exception for the Green group) and includes well-developed internal organizational arrangements, Rules of Procedure and decision-making norms. In general, the party groups are disciplined, despite the relatively low level of formal control wielded by the supranational leadership of the party groups (Kreppel, 2002). The European Peoples' Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED)

³ In addition, although the Rules of Procedure provide for independent members, the allocation of benefits discriminates against them and as a result there are generally relatively few. Members will prefer to join together in 'technical groups' rather than remain fully independent.

⁴ Decision making in the Conference of Presidents is done by weighted majority voting, which strongly favors the ability of the two largest groups to control outcomes. Basing the voting weight on party group strength insures, however, that voting will be fundamentally partisan and not, for example, nationally based.

⁵ The Rules of Procedure prohibit the formation of a party group with representatives from only one Member State and thus single national delegation party groups are not allowed.

and the Party of European Socialists (PES) exemplify this pattern to the greatest degree and include approximately two-thirds of the MEPs.

The high degree of similarity between political parties at the national and supranational levels is not replicated, however, in the parliamentary arena. While the supranational party groups of the EP are unquestionably weaker than the national parties of their members, they are generally organized internally along similar lines and function in very similar ways with high levels of voting cohesion, a basically hierarchical structure, sets of incentives to encourage member cooperation/coordination and strong ideological roots. The EP as an institution, however, functions in an environment that is fundamentally different from that of the Member State legislatures and as a result is a very different kind of institution.

II. Internal Organization and Structure in the EP

Unlike the national legislatures, in which the Government (single party or coalition) effectively controls the activities of the parliament through the executive branch,⁶ the EP works with the Commission (a formally non-partisan part of the executive and the initiator of all legislative proposals) to set its agenda. EP leaders balance the need to act quickly on legislative proposals with the desire to also give voice to Members' and groups' own initiative resolutions, permit question time and deal with internal business. The breadth of the activities pursued and the relative independence from the executive branch in the establishment of the EP's agenda is noteworthy as it distinguishes the EP from the national parliaments of the Member States and reflects the fundamentally different character of the EU, functionally a separation of powers system, from the fused powers parliamentary systems of its Member States.

Within the EP the bulk of the internal organizational decision making occurs in the Conference of Presidents (CoP). The CoP consists of the leaders of the party groups (or their representatives). Decisions within the CoP are made by simple majority vote, but the votes of the party groups are weighted proportionally based on their relative size within the EP.⁷ The CoP has significant powers including setting the agenda of the EP, assigning

⁶ There are some exceptions to this norm, for example the inability of the Italian executive prior to 1994 to set the agenda of the *Camera dei Deputati*, which instead set the agenda through a process of unanimous decision making by all the parties including the opposition.

⁷ The weighting of party group votes was an innovation adopted during the general revision of the Rules of Procedure following the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty. This change significantly increased the relative power of

reports to committees and determining the general character of the EP's internal organization.⁸ The decisions of the CoP are not always uncontroversial, but they are almost always definitive.

It is important to note that, although the supranational party groups are crucial in the internal organization of the EP (as noted above), the parties are not agents of the executive in the way that they are in the national parliamentary arena. Unlike the member states, the European Union is functionally, if not formally, a 'separation of powers' system. The executive branch (be it the Commission (bureaucracy) or the European Council (political executive)) is not drawn from the parliament or selected by the parliament and is only partially responsible to it.⁹ Though the EP has a vote of investiture over the Commission, overlapping membership is strictly forbidden and, at least thus far, the only serious attempt at 'censure' resembled an impeachment for 'crimes and misdemeanors' more than the standard European policy based political struggle found at the national level.¹⁰ As a result the institutional basis for strong parliamentary parties is not as clear-cut at the supranational level (within the EP) as it is within the member states individually.

Thus, the EP, despite being deeply influenced by the party groups, is not controlled by the executive via political parties. The result is a much stronger, more active and independent legislature than can be found in any of the 'old' EU-15 member states.¹¹ The inability of the executive branch (through the mechanism of the parties) to control the activities of the EP has allowed the EP to develop strong internal organizational structures that facilitate effective and independent legislative activity. As a result the committees of the EP are well established

the bigger party groups in the EP (see Kreppel, 2002, for an in-depth discussion of this and other Rules reforms in the EP).

⁸ Rule 24 lists the following as the duties of the CoP 1. Shall take decisions on the organization of Parliament's work and matters relating to legislative planning. 2. Shall be the authority responsible for matters relating to relations with the other institutions and bodies of the European Union and with the national parliaments of Member States. 3. Shall be the authority responsible for matters relating to relations with non-member countries and with non-Union institutions and organizations. 4. Shall draw up the draft agenda of Parliament's part-sessions. 5. Shall be the authority responsible for the composition and competence of committees, committees of inquiry and joint parliamentary committees, standing delegations and ad hoc delegations. 6. Shall decide how seats in the Chamber are to be allocated pursuant to Rule 31. 7. Shall be the authority responsible for authorizing the drawing up of own-initiative reports. 8. Shall submit proposals to the Bureau concerning administrative and budgetary matters relating to the political groups.

⁹ The European Council, which is the effective political executive of the EU is wholly independent from the EP in terms of both selection and tenure in office. The Commission is officially approved and can be censured by the EP, but this control function is fundamentally different from that of a true parliamentary system (see also footnote 2 above).

¹⁰ See Kreppel, 1999 and Hix *et al.*, 2003 for more information of the Santer Commission's resignation.

¹¹ It should be noted that there is a great deal of variation amongst the parliaments of Western Europe, however, fundamentally, all of them are tied, by the nature of a parliamentary system, to the executive and are thus less independent and as a result less influential.

and serve as the primary arena of activity in the EP. Like the US Congress, it can truly be said that the work of the EP is the work of committees. This is not surprising given the level of legislative activity pursued by the EP and its relative independence from executive control.¹²

The EP since its inception has structured its work around its committees. Today there are twenty-one full committees and an additional group of temporary and sub-committees.¹³ Every member serves on at least one committee, most serve on two and few serve on more than two.¹⁴ MEPs can only be *rapporteur* for a proposal that falls within the jurisdiction of a committee on which they serve and some committees (as is generally the case) are perceived to be more important than others (either in terms of the level of controversy of the issues they deal with or their relative significance).¹⁵

The distribution of committee positions is superficially decided by a vote of the Members as a whole. In reality however, seats within each committee are allocated to the party groups more or less proportionally on the basis of their relative size within the EP. The groups then in turn distribute their committee seats amongst the national party delegations within the group. In general the D'Hondt method of proportional allocation is employed (either formally or informally). Leadership positions within the committees (i.e. chairmanships) are distributed in a similar fashion.¹⁶ Leadership positions in the parliament as a whole are dealt with in somewhat different fashion, although again attention is paid to balance the relative weights of the various party groups allowing decreasing space for representation of national identity.¹⁷

¹² In general those legislatures that function as more than chambers of debate tend to be organized around a core set of strong committees that effectively mirror the ministries of the Executive (see Shaw and Lees, 1979).

¹³ Of these seven two are temporary committees of inquiry and five are standard temporary committees.

¹⁴ In general, service on more than two committees by a majority of members within a legislature suggests relatively weak committees since otherwise the workload would be unmanageable and specialization and the development of expertise unlikely.

¹⁵ A *rapporteur* is the person responsible for guiding the proposed bill through the legislature and often also in charge of negotiating inter-institutional compromises. The relative power and influence of a *rapporteur* varies across legislatures (and not all have them), but in general, *rapporteurs* play a significant role in the legislative process where they exist.

¹⁶ Points are allocated to each of the party groups based on their size. Groups can then 'bid' on committee chairmanships by ranking their preferences. Again the D'Hondt method is used meaning that the two largest groups get the largest share of chairmanship positions and generally the most coveted ones as well. For a more detailed discussion of this process see Corbett *et al.*, 2003.

¹⁷ Up until the 2004 enlargement the number of Vice Presidents always equaled the number of Member States minus one so that each Member State could be represented as either a Vice President or the President. This norm was not applied after the latest enlargement, as there are still just 14 vice presidents (not the 24 necessary to allow full member state representation).

There are additional organizational bodies within the EP including the more administrative Bureau (consisting of the President and Vice Presidents of the EP), the Conference of Committee Chairmen (a largely advisory body) and the Quaestors (who serve primarily as a secretariat of the EP).¹⁸ With the exception of the Vice Presidents, all of the internal positions of power within the EP reflect the political party groups and their relative strength within the EP.¹⁹ But it bears repeating that this predominant role of political parties exists despite the fact that the Members of the EP do not operate within a parliamentary system and therefore the parties are *not* instruments of executive control. The strength of the parties does not equal the dominance of the executive branch, as it tends to do in most parliamentary systems. In addition, the parties of the EP are strong only within the EP; they have little ability to control the electoral process that leads to the EP and, as a result, little control over the political fortunes of their members outside of the EP.

Thus, the EP is a parliament largely free of executive control with the result that, despite strong and influential supranational party groups, it is a comparatively independent institution. This independence, combined with its legislative powers, has resulted in a well developed internal structure with legislative activity based firmly in strong committees. Party groups, though strong and the primary organizational unit of the EP, do not serve as the agents of executive control. They are largely cohesive, but not at the same levels as the national parties because they lack both control over the electoral lists (the highest sanction) and the requirements of maintaining a strong governing coalition (the heaviest burden). Representatives from the current Member States elected to the EP find themselves within an institution in which parties are relatively less powerful (although they are not free from the constraints of their national party leadership) and the institution itself is relatively more powerful than the national norm (Hix *et al.*, 2003: 314). Committees and committee service are more important than at home, while parties at the supranational level are less important (though they still provide the basic organizational structure within the EP). As we shall see, the situation is significantly different for many of the MEPs elected from the new member states. While it is still too early to determine whether these differences will be problematic in the long-term or not, they are worth noting and monitoring as they may have long term effects on the internal development of the EP and its supranational party groups. Given the expanding role of the EP within the EU, and in the policy process in particular, even *potential* changes are worthy of further thought and analysis.

¹⁸ Rule 25 outlines the Duties of the Quaestors stating “The Quaestors shall be responsible for administrative and financial matters directly concerning Members, pursuant to guidelines laid down by the Bureau”.

In the next section the status and role of political parties, and in particular legislative parties of the new members will be reviewed with the goal of making implicit and explicit comparisons to the norms and realities of the old Member States and the EP as outlined above. In the following section the same will be done for some of the basic elements of internal parliamentary organization including the internal hierarchical structures, the role of committees and the level of independence from the executive branch.

III. Parties in the Post Communist Accession States

Parties are often understood as the intermediaries of a political system, acting as mediators between the citizens and government (Duverger, 1954; Sartori, 1976). It is not surprising then that the role of parties during a country's transition to democracy and throughout the process of democratic consolidation is crucial (Lijphart, 1994). However, in Central and Eastern Europe parties largely failed to play this critical role during the early phase of the political transition because there were almost no parties other than the ruling, and fundamentally illegitimate, communist party and its satellites. With some exceptions political parties generally formed after or during the first democratic elections throughout the region and became major actors in the political arena only later in the process of democratization.²⁰

Throughout the region opposition forces grouped in the form of social movements rather than institutionalized or formal party organizations (Pridham and Lewis, 1996). Most of the new political elite preferred diverse interests to be organized under broad social movements, forums and networks of friends, rather than political parties: Solidarity in Poland, Civic Forum and Public against Violence in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and so forth (Lewis, 2001). This was primarily a reaction to the communist party and the monopolistic system of rule it maintained during the Soviet era. The only political opposition that could develop was 'one of society against the state', in which opposition forces used methods of political organization that were explicitly informal to help distinguish them from the oppressively formal party bureaucracy of the Communist leadership. Resistance to party politics was particularly strong in Poland and Czechoslovakia. This anti-party sentiment was

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that after each enlargement the EP has voted to increase the number of Vice Presidents so that the total number of VPs plus the President equals the total number of Member States in the EU. This allows every country to have representation at this level.

²⁰ Hungary was the only country where the political parties were both the initiators and primary movers of the transition process (see Agh, 1994; Lewis, 2000).

reflected in the electoral slogans of the pro-democracy movements, such as “Parties are for party members, Civic Forum is for everybody”, adopted by the Civic Forum.

This anti-party sentiment had begun to erode by the time of the first free elections throughout the region. This was due to two simultaneous developments. First, new politicians of the region had realized that they needed stable and predictable support instead of shifting majorities if they were to compete effectively in the electoral arena. Second, the absence of an organizational structure began to create a generalized suspicion that the leaders of these movements could act without any constraint. Thus, the support for broadly based social movements as the major actors in the political system largely disappeared by the early 1990s to be replaced by increasing support for more typical political parties. As a result, the broad based social movements of the pro-democracy movements began to disintegrate and split into organizations that constituted the basis of new parties.

From this process four basic types of parties emerged throughout the region: 1) The Communist successor parties, 2) the former satellite parties of the Communist period, 3) the historical pre-Communist parties banned by the Communists and reformed after the collapse of the regime, and finally 4) newly formed political parties with no prior political history (Kostecky, 2002). Among these different types of parties it was the post-communist parties that most resembled their western counterparts in terms of their levels of membership and internal party organizational structures. The new parties that formed out of the early pro-democracy movements however developed into very different kinds of party organizations.

These new parties were elite centered and often based on personality and individual relations more than coherent ideological platforms. Party formation was therefore a ‘top-down’ process, as opposed to ‘bottom-up’ grassroots movement (Lewis, 1994). They emerged at an elite level and usually within parliaments as their western counterparts had done some hundred years prior. In the first few years of their formation most of the party activity of the region (with the exception of the post-communist successor parties), was confined to the parliament. Only a minimal role was played by the general party members, whereas a dominant influence was exerted by party leadership (Kopecky, 1995). In many cases even the conception of ‘rank-and-file membership’ did not exist and recognition of what party members were and what they might do was often lacking. In other words, the political parties of post-communist Europe were “more cadre than mass, more general than specific in their target audiences and more concerned with votes than with members” (Olson, 1998: 447).

Today central and eastern European parties and party systems are much more institutionalized and consolidated than they were a decade ago. The political parties of the region have increasingly come to resemble their Western European counterparts in their support for democratic rule and commitment to democratic principles, however, they tend to break markedly with them in terms of party organization, continuing to be composed of a small set of activists who make broad issue appeals rather than mass-based, ideologically driven and enduring as is the norm in Western Europe (Olson, 1998).

In pragmatic terms the political parties of post-communist Europe, except for the communist successor parties, are almost universally understaffed and weakly organized. They do not possess the resources or personnel of the communist successor parties, the parties of Western Europe or even the EP party groups. They often remain fragile lacking both a strong organizational structure and a solid party identity. Many have come to resemble catch-all parties, developing as organizations with very loose electoral constituencies that appeal to a wide clientele of voters (Kopecky, 1995). Although the party systems of CEE continue to evolve, in many ways they can still be characterized as 'electoral parties' that are likely to offer ideological and policy programs to win the elections as opposed to the typical Western European 'program parties' that concentrate on winning elections to implement their programs.

In terms of candidate selection and control over the electoral lists (and the related ability of party leadership to control their members effectively), almost all countries in the region have adopted the Western European practice of stipulating most aspects of the nomination procedure within the party statutes, thus allowing them to be changed if and when the party so chooses and maximizing elite control over the process. With regard to the issue of centralization and decentralization of candidate selection, the parties of the region are located at different points along the possible spectrum extending from completely centralized selection, where party candidates are nominated by central units to completely decentralized selection, where decisions can be made by local units without any interference from the central organs. Most post-communist European parties do not fit one of these extremes instead (as in the West) they tend to fall in between the two extremes with a great deal of variation among them making generalizations impossible.

The picture that emerges from this admittedly brief and general examination of the party systems of the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe is of a set of elite driven, ideologically vague and malleable parties that exist more as cadre organizations within the parliament than as social organizations with deep roots in society. To some extent this mirrors recent developments in Western Europe (e.g. Berlusconi's Forza Italia in Italy), but

the trend toward this type of catchall party is still relatively constrained in the West while it appears to be predominate in the CEE countries, with only the post-communist successor parties exhibiting a strong membership base and organizational structure. These differences in the character of the political parties and party systems are (not surprisingly) also reflected in the character and internal organizational structures of the parliaments of these countries.

IV. Parliaments in the Post Communist Accession States

The legislative practices and structures of the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe vary more broadly than do the basic character of their party systems. As a result it is more difficult to make broad generalizations with regard to the development and roles of legislatures in the region and greater reference will be made to specific examples. In spite of the variations that exist, there are some basic shared characteristics that are also significant. For example, without exception the countries of the region all had previous experience with parliaments, as these were at least formally the primary decision-making bodies within the previous Communist systems. The constitutions of communist Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland as well as most of the others stated without equivocation that the parliament was the highest state organ. In reality, as is well known, however it was the political party or parties in power (i.e. the Communist Party potentially with satellite parties) and its leadership that held the real reigns of power.

What is interesting, though rarely discussed in these terms, is the similarity of this basic situation to the general model existing in the parliamentary systems of most of Western Europe. Although the mechanisms for choosing the political parties that govern is without question democratic in Western Europe, the role of these parties once they gain control of the Government is often nearly as complete (while they are in power) as those of the former Communist regimes. In parliamentary systems in the West we find the same tendency to assert the primacy of the parliament (as the representative institution of 'the people'), yet in reality we rarely find a truly 'sovereign' parliament. Instead, we speak of '*partitocracy*' (Italy) or we note the ability of internal party decisions to change national leaders without recourse to elections (Thatcher in the UK). The well-documented norm of Governments in Western Europe having their legislative proposals and programs adopted overwhelmingly, most often without substantial revision by the parliament, is testament not to the power of the executive, but to the ability of political parties to control their members within the parliament (party

discipline).²¹ All of this is not intended to imply that the political systems and parties of Western Europe are not democratic, but is outlined to help explain why, given the formal similarities to the previous communist systems, the countries of CEE were not overly eager to replicate this overarching role for parties. In addition, the weaknesses of the party system outlined above made the duplication of this model largely impossible.

As a result the role of parties within the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe are fundamentally different from that played by parties in the West. There is of course variation across countries, time and parties. Whenever the communist successor parties are in government, given their relatively higher level of institutionalization, control over electoral lists and concomitant ability to discipline their members, the tendency to revert to a Western European model is increased (see particularly the communist-successor Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) governments in Poland in 1993-1997 and 2001-2005). In general however, political parties in the new member states are organizationally too weak to effectively control the actions of their members. Attempts by the party leadership to control member behavior often leads to defections and the formation of splinter groups. Party organizations have generally limited resources to offer members who cooperate and few sanctions against those who do not. The continued strong role of personality in the electoral arena and the overall instability of parties results in a reduction in the relative value of 'brand-naming' as individuals and small groups can often achieve (re)election without membership in an existing party (which may or may not exist in the next election).

This overall instability within the electoral arena is reflected in the character of the legislatures of the region and in their internal organizational structures. The relative underdeveloped character of the parties means that the executive branch (the standard mechanism of party control) is generally much weaker relative to the parliament than is the case in the West. This is reflected in the independence of the parliament as a whole from dominance by the executive, as well as its ability to impact legislative outcomes through strong committees and independent member activity. Both of which are clear features of the EP, but relatively rare amongst the parliaments of Western Europe.²²

The new parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe, but particularly, Hungary and Poland and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic and Slovakia are notable for their independence

²¹ For decades the expectation of government success was the so-called 90% rule, which holds that the executive initiates 90% of all legislation and that it is successful 90% of the time (see Olson, 1994).

²² There are of course exceptions, for example the committees of the German *Bundestag* as well as the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* are quite strong and the relative independence of the *Camera dei Deputati* in terms of setting its own agenda has been blamed, in part, for the growth of the use of decrees by the executive.

from the executive and strong internal structures, especially committees.²³ In most cases the relative weakness of the parties means that the individual members have a greater level of direct legislative influence through private member bills and the amendment process.²⁴ In some cases the success of private member bills have been close to 40% (Hungary) while individual member bills in Poland and the Czech Republic have lower success rates of approximately 30%, these are still far higher than the norm in Western Europe (Fitzmaurice, 1998). As an unsurprising corollary Government bills tend to have much lower rates of success than the norm in Western Europe averaging approximately 70% instead of the near 90% average in Western European systems (Olson, 1994). This level of direct individual member activity in the policy process is much more reminiscent of the norm in the EP (although there it is limited to the use of amendments since the Commission has the sole power of initiation) than to any of the national parliaments of Western Europe.

In addition to their ability to directly impact the policy process at a comparatively high level, most of the parliaments of CEE have consensual internal organizational units (House Committees, Presidiums, Councils of Elders, Political Bureaus, and Organizational Committees etc.) that are in charge of organizing the daily activities of the parliaments from setting the legislative agenda, to assigning bills to committees and interpreting the standing orders. These units are generally quite powerful and, importantly, in most cases the opposition is represented proportionately, giving it a clear voice in the internal control of the parliament and weakening executive control.²⁵ The ability of the executive to effectively control the agenda of the legislature is crucial in terms of assuring the success of its legislative programs and proposals as well as its ability to deal with crises. The ability of the opposition to block the executive through participation in the internal control mechanisms of the parliament is rare in Western Europe, but it is the norm in Central and Eastern European democracies where concerns about inclusion and the protection of minority interests was paramount in the early developmental years of the parliaments.²⁶

In the parliaments of the Visegrad countries the committees are highly institutionalized and serve as the primary organs for legislative policy making with a substantial portion of

²³ It is worth noting that other accession countries such as Estonia and Lithuania have much weaker, less institutionalized parliaments (see Ruus, 2002; Lukosaitis and Zeroulis, 2002).

²⁴ This is less true for the Czech Republic than the other Visegrad countries.

²⁵ One need only think about the impact of similar internal parliamentary structures on the functioning of the Italian parliament between 1971 and 1997 to see the effects of allowing significant agenda setting and internal management powers to the opposition within a strictly parliamentary system.

²⁶ Here again the Czech Republic is something of an outlier since membership in the Presidium has generally been limited to coalition members. However membership in the Organization Committee, which also plays an important

legislative proposals undergoing significant revision (Ilonszki, 2002; Karpowicz and Wesolowski, 2002; Mansfeldova *et al.*, 2002). Committees have evolved to a lesser degree in the other Central and Eastern European member states with the lowest level of evolution being found in the newly independent Baltic region, although here too the committees seem to be on their way to playing a larger role (Ruus, 2002; Lukosaitis and Zeroulis, 2002). In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia the committees themselves have the power to initiate legislation and in Poland and Hungary, though they initiate relatively few proposals, the committees have very high rates of success exceeding even those of the Government at times.²⁷ It is also worth noting that in most of these countries the very important committee chair positions are distributed proportionally to all parties, including the opposition. This gives still more power to the parliament *vis-à-vis* the executive by encouraging greater activity by the opposition.

In addition, in most of these countries the majority of legislative proposals are vetted first within the committees and only afterwards fully discussed on the floor of the assembly.²⁸ The significance of this practice should not be ignored as it demonstrates the extent to which the parliament serves as a true legislative body as opposed to a chamber of debate. The influence of committees on the legislative process is a mark of the institution's influence and independence (Shaw and Lees, 1979). When committees receive legislation only after it has been fully debated and amended on the floor they become little more than the agents of the governing majority with latitude only to implement decisions taken elsewhere. However, when committees control the initial review and amendment process they can greatly influence final outcomes. In most cases when committees control the first reading of a bill they also significantly influence the amendment process and the full chamber receives the amended version of the bills as well as a well-articulated justification from the committee appointed *rapporteur*. Committees with full powers of review and amendment tend to foster specialization and help the parliament develop independent sources of expertise, which increase independence from the executive still further. It is noteworthy that in many of the parliaments of Western Europe legislation is first heard on the floor of the assembly and only then sent to committee, reducing the influence of the committees, limiting the development of independent sources of information and expertise and increasing the influence and control of the executive.

role in the internal organization of the parliament, has members drawn from all of the political groups in the chamber (Fitzmaurice, 1998).

²⁷ This demonstrates the high level of support and respect the committees have amongst the members of the parliaments as a whole since they are often viewed as just and informed arbiters as opposed to political or ideologically inspired actors (see Kreppel, 2000; Fitzmaurice, 1998).

²⁸ Here again the Baltic countries and the Czech Republic are partial exceptions.

Overall the image presented of the parties and parliaments of the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe is significantly different from the norm found across Western Europe. Parties on the whole tend to be weaker, more loosely organized with only tenuous links to society at large and small membership bases. Partial exceptions to this pattern are the communist-successor parties that have, for the most part, been able to absorb and renew the pre-existing organizational structures and retain many members. The weaker character of the parties in the social and electoral arena is reflected in the parliament by the decreased ability of the executive to control the activities of the parliament via the political parties. In general, with the exceptions noted above, the organizational units of these parliaments include proportional representation for the opposition, guaranteeing them access to important functions such as agenda control and internal organizational decisions. In addition, across the region (but especially in the Visograd countries) committees have become remarkably strong. They have developed into important independent sources of information and are active participants in the legislative process with the ability to introduce new bills and strikingly high levels of legislative success. All of these characteristics tend to differentiate the parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe from their Western counterparts, but what do they suggest about the ability of parliamentarians and politicians from these countries to work within the EP? How will these norms of party activity, parliamentary behavior and executive-legislative relations mesh with the existing norms within the EP?

V. Potential Areas of Coordination and Conflict

As was noted above, the EP is largely autonomous from the Commission and the European Council as well as executively controlled exogenous supranational political party groups. This results in a very high level of EP independence in terms of the ability of actors within the institution to effectively control its agenda and develop its internal structures and norms largely free from externally imposed constraints or control. This legislative independence is primarily a result of the functional (if not formalized) separation of powers system of the EU as a whole. It is also what sets the EP apart from the legislatures of the member states (old and new), all of which exist within at least partially fused powers systems exemplified by the ability of the executive branch (generally via the political parties) to exert direct influence over the legislative realm.²⁹ Given the absence of either a formal or informal separation of powers systems at the member state level there is no reason to expect that any of the

²⁹ The relationship between the executive and legislative branches becomes less clear in semi-presidential systems, however even here the prime ministerial half of the dual executive follows the standard fused powers model.

legislatures of the member states would function or be internally organized in a manner similar to the EP.

And yet as was discussed above, a number of the legislatures of the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe have developed characteristics that resemble the EP far more than they do the national parliaments of Western Europe. The cause of this similarity can be found in the relative weakness of many of the political parties of new member states. One of the key aspects of a separation of powers system is the tendency to produce comparatively weak (in terms of effective party discipline and internal hierarchical structures) political parties. The quintessential case is the USA, where even those who argue that the parties are relatively strong within the Congress admit that this strength does not compare to the power of parties in Western European parliamentary systems (Cox and McCubbins, 1993). In the countries of CEE the comparative weakness of the political parties stems from historical and social variables rather than institutional structures, but it nonetheless leads to a similar inability on the part of national executives to control the activity of their parliaments (via parties). In other words, it is the relative fragility of political parties in the new democracies of CEE that has led, at least in part, to the kind of strong parliaments described above. The question is whether or not the similarities between these aspects of the legislative and partisan structures (despite their diverse origins) will facilitate (or potentially impede) the incorporation of the MEPs from CEE into the day-to-day functioning of the EP.

There are two aspects of the question that merit consideration. On the one hand the new member states have, on average, developed legislatures that are more independent from the executive and as a result have internal organizational structures and norms that resemble the EP to a greater extent than the parliaments of Western Europe. On the other hand, the continued absence of deeply entrenched, ideologically driven, stable and/or generally hierarchical party structures in many of these countries creates a sharp contrast between the partisan experience of MEPs from the new member states and those of Western Europe. It also diverges, albeit to a lesser degree, with the supranational parties within the EP. As discussed above, the supranational party groups of the EP lack the deep social penetration of most Western European parties, their party platforms represent an amalgamation of multiple national parties rather than a single narrowly defined ideological perspective and they lack control over the electoral futures of their members. Yet, despite these weaknesses, the party groups and their leaders do play a crucial role within the EP, and there are an increasing number of positive and negative incentives that can be used to influence

individual MEP activities under their control.³⁰ In this way they may represent a kind of middle ground between the party systems of the new and old member states in terms of the relative level of centralized party control over members.

In terms of adapting to the structural roles and institutional norms of the EP in the legislative sphere, the relative independence of the CEE parliaments, as well as the strength of their committee systems, bodes well for the incorporation of their representatives into the EP. The norms of strong committees, freedom from executive dominance and effective legislative participation will all be relatively familiar to most new MEPs from CEE, particularly those from the Visegrad countries and those from the non-communist successor parties.³¹ This is likely to make their transition to active and effective MEPs less problematic than it has been for some of the new MEPs from 'old' member states in Western Europe.³² Of particular importance in this context are the central role of committees and *rapporteurs* during the legislative process, combined with the ability of the committees to acquire independent sources of information, require testimony from members of the executive branch (especially the Commission) and effectively impact policy outcomes.

However, while the institutional structures and functioning of the EP itself may be more familiar to the new members of CEE than to their Western European counterparts, the central role that the party groups play within this context is likely to be significantly less familiar and potentially more problematic as a result. The party system of the EP, like that of many of the new member states, is primarily a 'cadre' type system, meaning that the organization of the parties occurs overwhelmingly within the parliament with relatively little social penetration through direct membership, party sponsored clubs or associations, social/civic organizations etc. (Ware, 1996). Similarly, the party groups of the EP and many of the national parties of the new member states share the absence of effective control over the future electoral fortunes of their members. However, in other respects the party system of the EP diverges significantly from those found in the new member states.

³⁰ Some of the resources in the control of the party group leadership include speaking time on the floor, assignment to coveted international delegations and specialized trips as well as access to internal party group resources.

³¹ This assumes of course that these individuals have some familiarity with and/or experience in their own national political systems. If they have no prior political experience then they enter the EP as a *tabula rasa* anyway and the character of the EP and the differences/similarities between the EP and the national system are of little consequence.

³² Several first time MEPs remarked during interviews conducted by Kreppel in 2001 (approximately two years into their first term) that they were still trying to get accustomed to the 'amount of work' entailed in being an MEP and that they had 'anticipated a less hectic work schedule' when they joined the EP.

Perhaps the most obvious difference is the remarkable stability of the EP party system over time, especially when we consider the impact of past enlargements and the changing character of the EU. There has been a Christian Democratic based party (now the EPP-ED), a generally Socialist party (now the PES) and a Liberal party (now the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ELDR)) since the very beginnings of the Common Assembly of the Coal and Steel Community. The Green party has been consistently present and more or less stable in relative size since its creation in the early 1980s. Although there have been some name changes across the years these four parties are clearly temporally consistent with almost no history of splinter group secession or internal divisions.

In addition, these parties have historically been amongst the largest groups in the EP, accounting for over 80% of total seats.³³ In addition to remaining stable over time, these groups have also managed to maintain high levels of internal voting cohesion, averaging generally between 80%-90% (Hix *et al.*, 2003). This is an important and necessary trait given the high level of absenteeism in the EP and the high voting threshold requirements for many decisions.³⁴ The continued ability of the EP to function efficiently and effectively depends to a great extent on the ability of these party groups to provide consistent, cohesive and stable leadership to the chamber as a whole.

³³ The Green group and the historically more ill-defined post-communist far left group (currently the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)) have often jockeyed for fourth place and currently the Green Group has 42 seats to the GUE-NGL's 41.

³⁴ An absolute majority of members is required to pass amendments and proposals in the second and third round of the co-decision procedure as well as for all assent agreements (for accession) and a number of other decisions. Since absenteeism remains high (at about 30% on average during plenary sessions) the absolute majority requirement is effectively a qualified super majority threshold of close to two-thirds.

Table 1: Seat Distribution by member states and party groups in the EP

	PPE- DE	PSE	ELDR	Verts/ ALE	GUE/ NGL	EDD	UEN	NI	Total
Austria	6	7		2				3	18
Belgium	6	7	6	2				3	24
Czech Rep	14	2			6	1		1	24
Cyprus	3		1		2				6
Denmark	1	5	4	1	1	1	1		14
Estonia	1	3	2						6
France	17	31	11	6	3	3		7	78
Finland	4	3	5	1	1				14
Germany	49	23	7	13	7				99
Greece	11	8			4	1			24
Hungary	13	9	2						24
Ireland	5	1	1		1	1	4		13
Italy	24	16	12	2	7	4	9	4	78
Latvia	3		1	1			4		9
Lithuania	2	2	7				2		13
Luxembourg	3	1	1	1					6
Malta	2	3							5
Netherlands	7	7	5	4	2	2			27
Poland	19	10	4			10	7	4	54
Portugal	9	12			3				24
Slovakia	8	3						3	14
Slovenia	4	1	2						7
Spain	24	24	2	3	1				54
Sweden	5	5	3	1	2	3			19
UK	28	19	12	5	1	10		3	78

Key: *PPE-DE*: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, *PSE*: Group of the Party of European Socialists, *ELDR*: Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party, *Verts/ALE*: Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, *GUE/NGL*: Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, *EDD*: Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities, *UEN*: Union for Europe of the Nations Group, *NI*: Non-Attached. New member states are in **bold**.

The addition of 162 new members from CEE to the EP, 118 of which joined these four groups (Table 1), may represent a potentially destabilizing element to the EP party system. Both the absence of the traditional Western European cleavage patterns within the party systems of the countries of CEE and the tendency toward personality based parties in these countries represent possible sources of future tension within the EP given the large number of MEPs involved. If MEPs from the new member states seek to replicate their national experience within the EP they may find themselves in conflict with the existing system because of the differences that exist between their partisan experiences at the national level and the supranational party system found within the EP

In fact, analyses of voting behavior in the EP have demonstrated that, despite the high aggregate levels of internal cohesion within the supranational party groups, cohesion patterns have varied across time and party group (Table 2). More importantly, at least some of this fluctuation can be ascribed to the impact of successive EU enlargements, which brought new members who did not 'fit' ideologically with the existing groups (Hanley, 2002). In some cases the lack of a 'good fit' inspired MEPs from accession countries to create new party groups. However, the difficulty in creating a new group are not insignificant and benefits accrue disproportionately to the larger groups, creating an incentive to simply join an existing party group (Corbett *et al.*, 2003). As Table 1 demonstrates, at least thus far, the vast majority of MEPs from the new member states have also selected to join existing party groups rather than form new ones.³⁵

Table 2: Cohesion in the EP

Party Group	EP 1 ¹ (1979-1984)	EP 2 (1984-1989)	EP 3 (1989-1994)	EP 4 (1994-1999)	EP 5 (1999-2002)
European Peoples Party (EPP)	0.899	0.934	0.907	0.898	0.859
Party of European Socialists (PES)	0.757	0.869	0.9	0.901	0.904
European Liberal, Democratic, and Reformist Group (ELDR)	0.849	0.849	0.847	0.861	0.909

Notes: 1. Numbers are indices of agreement (IA). The IA is a measure of voting cohesion of the political groups. The index is equal to +1 when the group members vote in the same way. Data are taken from Hix *et al.*, 2003.

³⁵ The rules governing new group formation have also changed over time and now prohibit the creation of a party group with representatives from only one member state, no matter how many MEPs it would be able to count as members.

Thus, the major party groups are once again facing the challenge of effectively incorporating new members with diverse ideological and organizational backgrounds as the MEPs from the new member states join their ranks. As a result of the size of the most recent enlargement, however, the scope of the challenge is beyond anything faced in the past. The three largest party groups experienced significant increases in their membership, with the PES growing by 14.3%, the EPP-ED increasing by 10% and the ELDR by an unprecedented 34%. The influx of new members by far outweighs what occurred in any of the previous enlargements, both in terms of sheer numbers and ideological/organizational diversity. For the EPP-ED and ELDR, whose new members have the highest level of internal ideological diversity, this increase could cause significant internal divisions.³⁶ The parties that joined these two groups include many of the post-Solidarity parties of Poland, the remnants of the Civic Forum and other pro-democracy movements that, as was noted above, are among the most poorly organized political parties in the region. The ability of the existing party groups to absorb this number of new members given their ideological diversity is not clear and it seems likely that at least initially the generally high level of internal party cohesion is likely to suffer.

There is also the possibility that some of the MEPs from the new member states, finding that they do not fit well within the established party groups, will eventually choose to create new ones despite the institutional disincentives. Though most new party groups created after past enlargements have proven to be short-lived, it is possible that one or more explicitly personality based party groups (along the national model) could be formed from among the MEPs of the new member states.³⁷ The addition of several new party groups of this sort could subsequently lead to a fragmentation of the EP party system if they attracted even the minimum number of members required to form an official party group. This would most likely serve to weaken the ability of the EP to work effectively given both the high level of coordination that must occur between the party groups during the legislative process and the very high rate of absenteeism (especially among the smaller party groups). The internal organization of the larger groups in particular is essential when absolute majorities are required and internal dissension, even if it did not result in actual splinter groups forming, could be devastating in terms of the legislative influence of the EP as a whole. The actual fragmentation of the EP party system as a whole would almost certainly result in a decrease in its relative power *vis-à-vis* the Commission and Council of Ministers.

Although the ideological diversity amongst the incoming members is probably the most significant challenge for the party groups caused by enlargement, norms of internal party

³⁶ The PES should have fewer problems since most of its new members are expected to be representatives of the communist-successor parties, which on the whole are both organizationally more cohesive and ideologically less dispersed.

³⁷ These might be modeled after the Lista Bonino Italian delegation in the EP led by Emma Bonino from 1999-2004, which while not a formal party group, was active within the EP.

group organization are also important and potentially problematic. Though linked to the question of group voting cohesion, internal party organization is broader and incorporates the ability of the party groups to continue their critical role as the central administrative unit within the EP. Though they do not control member recruitment (via national elections), the EP party groups are powerful, well organized and well staffed in terms of resources and personnel. Approximately one-sixth of the EP's internal budget is devoted to the party groups and the EP as a whole relies on them to manage much of the bureaucratic elements inherent in parliamentary activity (including agenda setting via the Conference of Presidents). If internal divisions become substantial they could negatively impact the ability of the party groups to play these crucial roles, weakening the EP as a whole. If MEPs from the new member states were to rebel against this very central role played by the party groups, and the group leaders in particular, it would represent another potential area of conflict within the EP.

Conclusions

Given the variations that exist between the different countries of Central and Eastern Europe it is difficult to try to assert broad or generalizable conclusions. However, it is possible to highlight some areas where conflicts between MEPs from the new member states and the pre-existing norms within the EP are likely to arise as well as some arenas in which they are likely to be better prepared than some of their predecessors, especially if we focus on the Visegrad countries, which account for over 70% of the new MEPs.

It seems clear from the above discussions that the biggest potential difficulty faced by the EP as a cause of the Eastern enlargement is not the strictly numerical aspect of the increase in its membership, but rather the added ideological and behavioral diversity that this enlargement brings. With the partial exception of the communist-successor parties, the new parties of the CEE are without clear parallel in the West and as a result in the EP. This does not necessarily mean that there will be long-term instability or conflict. In fact, previous experience with individual parties that did not 'fit the mold', such as the British Conservatives and Berlusconi's Forza Italia in Italy (both of which eventually found a home and relative peace within the EPP-ED), gives us reason to be optimistic in this regard.³⁸ It is quite

³⁸ For the Conservatives it took quite a long time and resulted in the addition of the "-ED" to the name of the EPP. For the Forza Italia the process has been much quicker and despite the clear differences between the Forza Italia and the other member parties of the EPP-ED the new Italian members are notable for their cohesion and cooperation within the party group (see Kreppel, 2004).

possible that after a period of tension and adjustment a *modus operandi* will be reached between most of the new national party delegations and the existing party groups.

Regardless of the emergence of explicit areas of conflict within or between party groups, there are winners and losers of the most recent enlargement from the perspective of the current party groups. For example, there are almost no green parties in the new member states. Though this is not surprising given the general assumption that green parties develop only in a 'post-materialist' environment of relative wealth, prosperity and stability (Inglehart, 1990), the result for the Green group in the EP (Verts-ALE) is a notable decrease in their relative stature, particularly *vis-à-vis* the two largest parties. The Liberal group (ELDR), whose ranks have swelled as a result of new members joining from the Eastern and Central European countries, risks suffering a greater level of internal diversity than the other groups. Although they have historically welcomed smaller party delegations and multiple delegations from the same country (which both tend to create high levels of internal diversity), the most recent additions vary more than those of the past. In addition, the internal organizational mechanisms of the ELDR are on the whole less well developed than those of the two largest groups, largely by design and the absence of a desire to inflict strict party voting upon members (Kreppel, 2002). The Socialist PES group, which saw its membership drop precipitously in the 1999 EP elections, has benefited significantly from attracting the second largest number of MEPs from the new member states, especially since the national party delegations that joined the PES are those communist successor parties that have been noted as being the most cohesive and well-organized at the national level. On the other hand, in some instances these parties remain too closely linked to their historic pasts to be fully welcomed into the PES.³⁹

In contrast to the potential problems posed by the absorption of the new national party delegations into the party system of the EP, the incorporation of the members themselves into the working structures of the EP seems far less likely to be problematic. For the most part the new MEPs are coming from countries in which the parliament is significantly stronger than is the norm in the West. The primacy of committees, the direct participation in policy-making by individual members of the governing coalition as well as the opposition and the inclusion of the all parties in the organizational structures of the institution are all elements that new members will find familiar in the EP. Though the original motivation for these norms and structures may be fundamentally different (weak parties and executives on

³⁹ For example, it took a number of years for the reformed Italian communist party to be accepted into the PES even after it changed its name to the Democratic Party of the Left and disavowed any communist leanings (see Kreppel, 2004).

the one hand versus a separation of powers system on the other) the results are largely the same and should help to ease the transition of these new members to fully integrated and active members of the EP.

Thus, the entry of over 160 new members on May 1st 2004, poses some significant challenges for the EP in terms of the ideological cohesion of its supranational party groups (and the related ability to effectively participate in the legislative process given the majority thresholds), but is likely to be less problematic than some of the previous, smaller, enlargements have been in terms of the ability of the new members to adapt to the working methods and work load of the EP. Thus, the weakness of most parties in the CEE, which is often decried as bad for democracy and evidence of the instability of these new political regimes, may have both positive and negative implications for the integration of the MEPs from these countries into the EP.

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Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Political Science Series 108

Editor: Sylvia Kritzinger

Associate Editor: Inge Korneck

ISSN: 1605-8003

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